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ABSTRACT

The reading resource teacher program established in the Madison, Wisconsin, Public Schools is described. Volunteer classroom teachers were given 20 hours of special training in reading and one-half day a week released time to assist their principals in reading curriculum development. Such consideration as cost, teacher-ability differences, staff acceptance, and additional training programs are discussed. Because each principal utilizes the services of the reading resource teacher according to the reading curriculum needs of his school, the roles differ among the participating schools. The various roles described include acting as a liaison person with central office consultants, establishing tutorial programs, providing diagnostic services, purchasing instructional reading materials, supporting the classroom teacher, providing specialized teaching, and serving on curriculum committees. (CM)

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THE ROLE OF THE READING RESOURCE TEACHER

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(Sessions: Reading Resource Teachers, Thursday, May 7, 1970, 9:00-10:00 a.m.)

The primary role of the school principal is to provide instructional leadership. However, an examination of the required academic preparation for school principals shows that the emphasis of a principal's preparation is on administrative procedures and technical knowledge. Curriculum development is definitely a minor part of most training programs for principals. Consequently, elementary school principals often need assistance from persons who are specially trained to perform curriculum development work in certain instructional areas.

The reading resource teacher program was established in the Madison, Wisconsin, Public Schools as a means of helping elementary school principals

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fulfill their instructional leadership responsibilities in the area of reading curriculum development. Volunteer classroom teachers were given special training in reading and one-half day a week released time from their classroom duties to assist their principals in the development of good instructional reading programs in their individual schools. The intent of the program was to give principals easy access to a person with special interest and special training in what is considered by many principals to be the major curriculum area in the elementary school. The specifics of the establishment of the Madison program have been reported in detail by Smith (1).

Role Determinants

Cost

Reading resource teachers have been an integral part of Madison's reading program for three years. Thirty-three of the 37 elementary schools in the Madison District are utilizing these special teachers. The teachers receive no financial reimbursement in addition to their regular teaching salaries. Therefore, the cost of the program to the district is limited to the cost of hiring the same substitute teacher one-half day a week for each reading resource teacher. Cost, then, is a role-determinant in so far as the amount of released time for each teacher is determined by the amount of money budgeted for the hiring of regular substitute teachers. Within the present arrangement the resource teachers are limited to offering services that can be provided during that one-half day each week they are released from their classroom responsibilities.

Differences in Need and Ability

Since the beginning of the program, the role of each reading resource teacher has been emerging. Because each principal is urged to use his resource teacher in any way that he feels best serves the reading curriculum needs of his school, the roles differ among the participating schools. The roles also differ as a result of the different academic and personal qualifications of the volunteer teachers. All of the teachers have experienced the same initial 20-hour training program, but their pre-service education and in-service experiences prior to assuming the reading resource teacher positions are vastly dissimilar. The tasks they are willing and able to accept are therefore decidedly different.

Gaining Staff Acceptance

One important factor in determining the roles of the various resource teachers has obviously been the effectiveness of the principal and the reading resource teacher in gaining staff understanding and acceptance of the reading resource teacher concept. Most principals have effectively established their reading resource teachers as consultants to other teachers in their buildings. In schools where their role as consultant has been accepted by the teaching staff, reading resource teachers spend most of their released time conferring with individual classroom teachers about grouping, materials, diagnostic procedures and other common concerns of elementary teachers. In the few schools where the consultant role has not been effectively established, the reading resource teachers work in effective, but more impersonal ways to improve the instructional reading program in their schools. Surprisingly, the reading resource teachers have received practically no opposition or disdain from fellow

classroom teachers. However, the kinds of services other classroom teachers have requested and been willing to accept have varied from school to school and from teacher to teacher. It was anticipated that beginning teachers would be more accepting of reading resource teacher help than more experienced teachers. Observation indicates that this is not generally the case. Years of teaching experience does not appear to be a factor in teacher acceptance of consultant help.

Additional Training Programs

The services performed by the reading resource teachers have also been influenced by the special educational opportunities available to them after their initial training program. Each year one in-service education class is held for reading resource teachers exclusively. Attendance is encouraged but not required, and professional advancement credits which improve the teachers' positions on the Madison salary schedule are awarded for the successful completion of each class. These classes are planned and taught by central office reading consultants in conjunction with University of Wisconsin professors of education. Each course is designed to help the teachers carry out a particular reading curriculum project in their individual schools. The latest of these classes focused upon the poor reader in the classroom. The reading resource teachers studied the different causes of reading retardation and attempted to establish different categories for poor readers according to the cause and the severity of the disability. Questionnaires were prepared and distributed by the resource teachers to obtain classroom teachers' perceptions of the different kinds of problems presented by different types of poor readers in their classrooms and to obtain their suggestions for

coping with the problems. The information obtained was analyzed and used to prepare a curriculum guide for helping teachers meet the needs of the poor readers in their classrooms. For the duration of this particular class, then, the teachers who participated in the class were taking a leadership role in curriculum development for poor readers. Other in-service classes have focused on different concerns and thereby prompted different short-term emphases.

Specific Roles Performed

Laiason with Central Office Consultants

One important role of all reading resource teachers has been to help maintain a laiason between central office reading consultants and the individual elementary schools. About three times a year meetings are held between central office consultants and small groups of reading resource teachers who meet in a school that is centrally located to the schools of the attending teachers. At these meetings reading resource teachers discuss their problems, share their successes and are acquainted with central office activities in reading curriculum development. These meetings also serve to acquaint central office consultants with classroom problems and with program development taking place in the schools.

Establishing Tutorial Programs

Some reading resource teachers are responsible for organizing community resources to provide tutorial services for students who need special help with their reading. The community resources that have been tapped include retired teachers, high school Future Teachers of America clubs, certain qualified parents, upper elementary school students and students

from University of Wisconsin remedial reading classes. This latter resource provides approximately 30 students each semester who, as a course requirement, work one hour or more each week providing diagnostic and corrective help for mildly disabled readers. With the help of central office consultants and university personnel, reading resource teachers are able to assign tutors to children likely to profit from special help, supply needed tutorial materials, and supervise the tutoring.

Providing Diagnostic Services

Prior to the creation of reading resource teachers the primary functions of Madison's central office reading consultants were diagnosing students with reading problems and recommending instructional procedures for classroom teachers to use with them. Since a major part of the training of reading resource teachers is devoted to diagnosing the needs of poor readers, the reading resource teachers are now able to provide diagnostic services for all but the most seriously disabled students in their schools. This has made it possible for the central office consultants to spend more time on helping teachers and principals provide better reading instruction for the majority of their students. In addition, disabled readers are now receiving diagnostic services more promptly than previously and by a person familiar with their school and home conditions.

Purchasing Instructional Reading Materials

Although certain instructional reading materials are selected for the entire Madison district by teacher and administrator committees, individual schools have considerable autonomy in deciding which of the selected basic materials and which of the selected supplementary materials they will use. One major role of reading resource teachers is to help

teachers and principals make wise decisions regarding the materials they purchase for their students. This role requires resource teachers to be familiar with available materials. Therefore, one part of their training familiarizes them with many of the different materials on the market and teaches them how to evaluate instructional reading materials in terms of the needs of students.

When new materials are left at the central office instructional materials center by publishing companies, all reading resource teachers are notified by a form letter that those materials are available for inspection. A brief description of the nature and purpose of the materials is included to help resource teachers decide whether or not they wish to inspect them. Many reading resource teachers arrange for periodic displays in their schools of materials they inspect and encourage teachers to experiment with materials that look promising. Nearly all principals enlist the aid of their reading resource teachers in preparing the purchase orders they submit for instructional reading materials. Materials that are being considered for district-wide adoption are often tested by reading resource teachers in their own classrooms before final decisions are made. All in all, reading resource teachers are probably the most influential persons regarding the purchase of instructional reading materials in the Madison district.

Supporting the Classroom Teacher

Reading resource teachers are first and foremost classroom teachers. However, their title, special training and accomplishments have given them some prestige among administrators, other classroom teachers and parents. Their expertise in the area of reading instruction is generally acknowledged throughout the community. Consequently, they are often called upon

to support teachers' requests to principals and teachers' judgments regarding individual students to the students' parents. It is not unusual for reading resource teachers to work cooperatively with other teachers to prepare for parent-teacher or principal-teacher conferences and on occasion to participate in these conferences.

Good public relations with the community is of course vital to a teacher's success. One reading resource teacher organized a class on reading instruction for interested parents. Parents were given opportunities to ask questions about and discuss their children's instructional reading program. Principals frequently refer questions from parents about the school's reading program to resource teachers. And it is not unusual for reading resource teachers to receive telephone calls from parents concerned about the reading instruction their children are receiving. When these inquiries are received about children in classrooms other than their own, the reading resource teacher is in an excellent position to support the work of the teacher or investigate the concerns of the parents in an objective and non-threatening manner.

Specialized Teaching

Most reading resource teachers do little or no work other than diagnostic testing directly with students. However, several have made specialized teaching their primary role. Most of this extra help is given to small groups of children requiring short-term corrective help. One resource teacher, on the other hand, has organized a reading club for accelerated readers.

Service on Curriculum Committees

Reading resource teachers play prominent roles in the development of system-wide curriculums for the Madison Public Schools. Their services

are much in demand for the writing of curriculum guides, textbook adoption committees, the Superintendent's Faculty Advisory Committee and other groups working to improve instructional programs. Because of their participation in curriculum committee work, reading is kept in the forefront of each committee's considerations. Consequently, committees developing curriculum in areas other than reading are being alerted to such things as the need for selecting materials at various reading ability levels and the possibilities for incorporating reading instruction into the content area curriculums.

Role Satisfactions

Principals, parents, classroom teachers, students, central office staff, university personnel and reading resource teachers, themselves, have openly expressed satisfaction with the program. Much of this satisfaction must be attributed to the voluntary and flexible nature of the program that permits participating schools to use reading resource teacher services as they see fit. Although no principal or reading resource teacher has ever been required to continue participation in the program, no school has abandoned the program and only a few reading resource teachers have asked to be replaced. When a reading resource teacher does request a replacement, volunteers are readily available and are promptly given the required training individually or in small groups.

At present the only major dissatisfaction appears to be the shortage of released time available for reading resource teachers to perform the many services they are capable of performing. It has been necessary to caution these teachers not to overburden themselves, but to be satisfied to give service in accord with the limitations of the amount of released time they are given.

References

1. Smith, Richard J. "A Reading Resource Teacher for the Elementary School," The Reading Teacher, 22 (May, 1969), 696-701.